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Basic to composition skill is control of sentence structure and accuracy in mechanics. Although it is often said that a student should not write what he has not first heard and practiced orally, it might equally well be said that he should not be expected to write grammatical patterns that he has not read, inasmuch as there is a difference in the structures used in speech and writing. One approach to developing control over patterns in writing is through transformational grammar, because it provides (1) a systematic method of constructing sentences; (2) a device for identifying faulty constructions; and (3) an understanding of how structures which seem similar on the surface may be quite different structures with quite different meanings ("Grading papers/crying babies can be a nuisance"). Studies conducted in the combining of simple statements into more complex sentences show that the more mature and skillful the writer, the more he uses transforms, particularly nominal-producing transforms. The author suggests having students first express their ideas in short simple sentences to develop a feeling for the essential elements of a sentence. They may then move on to combining by coordination or subordination with an adverb clause, passive forms, relative and noun clauses, and verbals. An exercise in combining sentence patterns concludes the paper. (AMM)

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*Controlled Writing: A Transformational Approach**

Janet Ross

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Acquiring skill in composition involves acquiring control over rhetorical devices—setting up a central idea, maintaining this idea throughout the composition, presenting the material in orderly sequence, and so on. Basic to composition skill is control of sentence structure and accuracy in mechanics so that the student writes correctly the first time and does not practice errors. Control over sentence structure can be exercised by a number of different devices, most of which involve imitation of some kind. We often say that speech should precede composition, that a student should not write patterns that he has not first heard and then practiced orally. But there is a difference in the structures used in speech and in writing. Written patterns are more compactly structured. We might equally well say that the student should not be expected to write grammatical patterns that he has not read. The person who writes well is usually the one who has read widely and who has heard good oral reading. Though he may not imitate in his writing all of the layers of structure used in any one sentence he has read, he observes through reading what the patterns of the language are. By conscious manipulation of these patterns in writing, he can develop control over their use. One approach to doing this is through an application of transformational grammar, not because transformational grammar presents rules but because it provides a systematic method of constructing sentences.

I have heard English teachers reject transformational grammar as the learning of formulae and the construction of "branching tree" diagrams, activities which would seem to have little carry-over to composition either for the native student or the student of English as a seocnd language. But one aspect of transformational grammar is its analysis of a sentence as consisting of a kernel or basic sentence pattern—the "bare" sentence that I learned about in traditional grammar in the seventh grade—the elements of which can be rearranged or into which other kernel patterns can be inserted by a "transform" process to produce the most complex of sentence structure patterns. The person for whom English is the first language may use forms, particularly in speech, that are not acceptable to the educated because that is what he has heard: *We was* or *He done it*. In his writing he may produce dangling modifiers or otherwise poorly constructed sentences through lack of skill. But unlike the person who may speak as a first language one that is put together in a way very different from English, he does not violate the basic system. For example, the native speaker of English would not say, "All gone milk," or write, as one of my foreign students recently did, "The French little pretty girl sang a song." He chooses the correct pattern not

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because he has learned a rule but because through using the language all his life he has developed a feeling for the system by which it operates. However, by identifying the kernel sentence patterns of English and deliberately practicing the variety of ways in which they can be combined and rearranged the native speaker can perhaps learn something about variety and style. By this same method the student of English as a second language can develop a greater feeling for the orderly patterning of the language and for its basic structure system. Not only does transformational grammar offer a method of sentence building, it also provides a device for identifying faulty transforms or sentence constructions. Furthermore, it may be used to develop an understanding of how structures which seem similar on the surface as in the sentences "*Grading papers* can be a nuisance" and "*Crying babies* can be a nuisance" are actually quite different structures with quite different meanings. It is a method that many of us have used in part in our teachings without the label "transformational" or without systematizing it.

Before setting forth in detail a procedure for approaching the teaching of composition through sentence building by transforms, a review in more detail of some of the processes of transformational grammar might be in order. The system as set forth by Owen Thomas[1] identifies four kernel patterns as follows, as distinguished by the verb:

	1	2	3	4	
Pattern 1	N	V	....	(Adv)	Intransitive verb
Pattern 2	N	V	N	(Adv)	Transitive verb
Pattern 3	N	V	{Adj / N}	(Adv)	Linking verb
Pattern 4	N	be	{Adj / N / Adv}	(Adv)	

These patterns consist of four positions: subject, verb, complement, and adverb. After most verbs the fourth or adverb position is optional. The four positions can be rearranged in certain ways, sometimes with the use of structure words such as negatives, auxiliaries, or prepositions. Questions, negative patterns, sentences beginning with *there is* are examples of rearrangement transforms, as is the subject-verb inversion in a sentence like *Sitting beside the road was a little green man from Mars.* A somewhat more complicated rearrangement transform is the passive. Students can be shown that a pattern 2 sentence (the transitive verb pattern) like *Carpenters built the house* can be rearranged to *The house was built by carpenters.* However, this cannot be done with pattern 1 sentences like *John arrrived* or *The accident happened.*

Another type of transform results from the combination of two or more patterns. Simple examples that a child uses in his writing in the early years

[1] Owen Thomas, *Transformational Grammar and the Teacher of English* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965).

of school are the compound sentence with patterns joined by *and* or *but* and the adverbial clause introduced by a subordinated word like *if, because, although,* or *when.* More difficult is the relative clause used adjectivally. A student, native or foreign, may write *I met a fellow in the Student Center* or *He gave me some directions* and fail to see the possibility of substituting *who* for the subject in the second sentence and combining them to produce *I met a fellow in the Student Center WHO gave me some directions.* A relative clause in which *whom* or *that* substitutes for the object poses a greater problem because both rearrangement and combination are involved. If in the combination one pattern is embedded in the other rather than added to the end as in the sentence above, there is still another difficulty. Doubtless we have all encountered the pattern that foreign students often produce: *A fellow WHOM I MET HIM IN THE STUDENT CENTER gave me some directions.* One familiar with the structure of the language can see that the problem is that the embedded clause contains two complements—*him* in the normal complement position and *whom,* which substitutes for it, at the beginning of the pattern. An embedding transform is described by transformationalists as consisting of a kernel that forms a matrix and other kernels called constituents that are inserted into it with changes necessary for the combination. A relative clause transform with *whom* or *that* serving as direct object might be shown as a combination of two patterns as follows:

A fellow gave me some directions. (Matrix)
I met {the fellow / whom} in the Student Center. (Constituent)

Whom is substituted for *the fellow* in the constituent sentence and moved to the beginning of the sentence. Then the entire sentence is embedded in the matrix to produce *A fellow WHOM I MET IN THE STUDENT CENTER gave me some directions.*

It is this combining process that gives variety and complexity to English sentence structure. The process involves more than simple coordination and subordination, however. To classify sentences as simple, compound, or complex does not describe the vast complexity of English sentence structure. English is a language that makes much use of the nominal—any structure in a noun position in a sentence. A noun and its modifiers, a noun clause, a verbal construction, a prepositional phrase—all of these may function as nominals. And these may all be built up by transforms that embed one kernel pattern in another. Some of the noun-plus-modifier patterns are variants of the relative clause transform. Thus the sentences *The children shouted to each other* (Matrix) and *The children played outside the house* (Constituent) can be combined to *The children WHO PLAYED OUTSIDE THE HOUSE shouted to each other* or *The children PLAYING OUTSIDE THE HOUSE shouted to each other.*

The noun clause or prepositional phrase in the noun position involves a somewhat different transform process. A student might write *John played the piano. This surprised me.* The transformational grammarian would set

the sentence up to be combined in this fashion: SOMETHING *surprised me* (Matrix) and *John played the piano* (Constituent). The resulting combination, with the constituent substituting for SOMETHING, could be any one of the following: *JOHN'S PIANO PLAYING surprised me, FOR JOHN TO PLAY THE PIANO surprised me, JOHN'S PLAYING THE PIANO surprised me, or THAT JOHN PLAYED THE PIANO surprised me.* Putting the last sentence into the passive we get: *I am surprised THAT JOHN PLAYED THE PIANO* or *I am surprised BY JOHN'S PIANO PLAYING.* By using the second sentence of our original pair as the matrix, we get: *TO MY SURPRISE, John played the piano* or *SURPRISINGLY, John played the piano.*

The sentence adverbials *TO MY SURPRISE* and *SURPRISINGLY* in the above sentences obviously convey quite a different meaning in relationship to the rest of the sentence from that indicated by the adverb *SURPRISINGLY* in the kernel sentence *John played the piano SURPRISINGLY.* This example shows yet another use of transformational grammar—to gain an understanding of meanings of grammatical structures and perhaps show this understanding in more precise writing. Through transformational grammar also, it has been suggested, we can analyze the difference in structures that seem the same on the surface but which have a different underlying deep structure in that they derive from different sentence-combining transforms. Let us return to the pair of sentences *GRADING PAPERS can be a nuisance* and *CRYING BABIES can be a nuisance.* The first sentence results from a combination of *SOMETHING can be a nuisance* (Matrix) and *I grade papers* (Constituent); but the second results from *SOMETHING can be a nuisance* (Matrix) and *Babies cry* (Constituent).

Let us take another example. The sentences *He wanted the guest to leave* and *He wanted the milk to drink* seem superficially the same. Yet the first may be produced from a combination of *He wanted something* and *The guest left,* and the second from *He wanted the milk for something* (for some purpose) and *He drank the milk.*

The errors that users of English as a second language make in their writing come in part from lack of control over the transform patterns of English. We are all familiar with errors in rearrangement like: *What means this word?* or *An accident was happened.* More difficult are the sentence-combining transforms. If we are to teach systematically how these transforms operate, where should we begin? Part of the answer depends on the degree of correspondence between the structures of English and those of the native language of the learner. The ability to write sentences in which ideas that might have been expressed in a number of simple statements have been combined is the mark of a mature writer of his native language, and some guidance may be found in structures written by native users of English at various stages of their maturing process. A significant study was conducted by Professor Kellogg Hunt of Florida State University, who examined samples of the writing of native American school children at the fourth, eighth, and twelfth

grade levels and compared the transforms they used with those found in prose selections written by mature writers in *Harpers* and the *Atlantic.*[2] He found that the coordination pattern is used, in fact overused, by the fourth graders. The use of subordination increases with maturity, but more significant is the type of subordination. Adverbial clauses were used quite frequently by the fourth graders, but the use of relative clauses modifying nouns more than doubled during the eight-year span. There was also an increase in the higher grades in the use of verbals both as nominals and as modifiers, and in the use of noun clauses. The most significant difference between the writing of the skillful adults and of the school children, even the twelfth graders, was not in subordination or even in use of relative clauses to subordinate in the length of the clauses. This length is obtained through using a wider variety of nominals and through depth of modification—the combining of a number of ideas into one nominal that a person with less facility in writing expresses in a number of simpler sentences. In other words, the skillful writer makes more use of transforms, particularly nominal-producing transforms. Professor Hunt concludes that if one wishes to teach students to write like superior adults one should teach them to combine ideas, to pack more into a clause. This means combining more and more sentences through a transform process.

With students of English as a second language one might begin with short, simple sentences. That is, for a few lessons have the students express their ideas in sentences that are little more than kernel patterns so that they develop a feeling for the elements that must be present in what is properly written as a sentence. A method of slot substitution might be useful here, and the resulting sentences combined into a meaningful paragraph. For example, students could be given the four patterns set forth earlier in this discussion to which could be added the variations with the indirect object, the objective complement, and the *there is* transform. Then they could be asked to write an account of a personal experience in which they use each pattern at least once. Suggestions for assignments are an account of a dinner party, the receiving of a gift or letter, the election of the officer of a club. A sample passage could be provided, and the students could be asked to identify the patterns in the passages they have written. At this stage there could be a review of verb forms by turning passages in the present tense into the past or present perfect. Examples should be given to show when these forms are appropriately used. For example, students could write short paragraphs in the present tense telling what they do every day, or do habitually in school. Then they could turn these into the present perfect by relating what they have done since morning or since the school year began. Drill on use of verb forms could recur throughout the period of instruction.

From writing simple kernel patterns students could move to combination by coordination or subordination with an adverb clause. A composition topic

[2] Kellogg Hunt, *Grammatical Structures Written at Three Grade Levels.* (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1965).

could be assigned that calls for expressing relationships with subordinators: a time relationship with *when, after, before, since;* a cause-effect relationship with *because;* or one of possibility or contingency with *if* or *although.* At the same time, in their reading students can look for the base pattern or matrix in the sentences and spot the subordinators or connecting words which join another pattern to it. They need to see that two patterns must be present in a sentence when a pattern is introduced by a subordinating word and that connecting words cannot introduce both kernels, so that they will *not* write, as did a student from Iran who recently applied for admission to our school: *ALTHOUGH I have not passed the English test BUT I hope you will admit me.*

From these combinations one can move to those that seem to be more frequent sources of error. The passive does not seem to pose a problem for the native American school child but it often does for users of English as a second language, as seen by the frequency of sentences in their writing like *An accident was happened* or *John was arrived.* The equivalent of these is possible, of course, in some languages, as for example in French. The active to passive transform can be drilled on, and students can be given sentences some of which can be turned into the passive and some not. Selections illustrating the use of the passive should be provided and students could be asked to turn the sentences in a paragraph into the passive when appropriate or to write a paragraph calling for the use of the passive: Describe the progress that *has been made* toward a given goal such as getting a school diploma. (How many courses *have been completed?* How many compositions *have been written?*) Or what work *has been done* in planning a project such as a class party? (How many invitations *have been sent out?* How many acceptances *have been received?* What food *has been prepared?*)

Facility in the use of relative clauses, we have noted, seems to grow with maturity, and clauses with *whom* or *that* as direct objects seem to be particularly difficult. Students can be given pairs of sentences to combine first by substituting *who* or *that* for the subject of the second one and then by substituting *whom* for the object, as in the examples given earlier. An easy introduction to this combination is to make the subject of the second sentence identical with the object of the first, as in the previously illustrated pair: *I met a student in the Student Center* (Matrix) and *He gave me some information* (Constituent).

The use of noun clauses as objects of verbs as in sentences beginning: *He said that . . .* are not difficult for native users of English. Such constructions appear commonly in the sentences written by fourth graders that Professor Hunt studied. Foreign students, however, often have difficulty with the tenses in this structure and in reported questions. As an exercise they can be given a series of questions such as: *What did you do yesterday? Where did you go? Whom did you see there?* and then asked to write a paragraph reporting *My teacher asked me what I did yesterday. He asked*

me where I went, etc. An additional paragraph might report *I told him that I had gone to the football game,* and so on.

Verbals and noun clauses as subjects were structures that Professor Hunt found were used much more frequently by professional writers than by students, even at the twelfth grade level. Their use seems to be the mark of a mature writer, and thus they might be taught late. One method is through the sentence-combining transform with SOMETHING illustrated earlier in the sentences: SOMETHING *surprised me* and *John played the piano.*

A structure that seems particularly difficult is the verbal as modifier at the beginning of the sentence: *Walking down the street, I saw many interesting sights.* In the hands of unskillful writers, both native and foreign, we of course get *Walking down the street, many interesting sights were seen.* If students approach this structure by writing the sentences *I walked down the street* and *I saw many interesting sights* and then try to combine them, the problem is that the first sentence, though it is the one that would normally be written first, is the constituent rather than the matrix in the transform. In drills perhaps the matrix should be consistently presented first regardless of which sentence would be written first if the ideas are expressed in two sentences. The identity of the subjects of the two sentences should also be pointed out. Care must be exercised to avoid the structure *Seeing many interesting sights, I walked down the street.*

While during the period of instruction there should be frequent review of transforms already drilled on, the procedure can be much the same throughout: (1) a systematic presentation one by one of the rearranging and kernel-combining transforms, first by combining pairs of sentences and then by writing compositions designed to call for the combined structures; and (2) when faulty sentences are produced, the use of the transform process to show students where they have gone astray. Along with this writing practice there should be reading material in which the stuctures that the students are to build are used. Sometimes material will have to be specifically written to show this, but material in other books that the students are reading can also be used. As students become proficient in combining pairs of sentences, more sentences can be added so that they can combine something like the following:

The term came into prominence in 1957. Matrix
AT THAT TIME Noam Chomsky published *Syntactic Structures.*
This book presents a brief and somewhat technical discussion of the original form of the theory.
Noam Chomsky is a professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

with the resulting:

The term came into prominence in 1957 when Noam Chomsky, a professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, published *Syntactic Structures,* which presents a brief and somewhat technical discussion of the original form of the theory.[3]

[3] Thomas, p. 1.

From time to time, as needed for understanding, transforms can be used to illustrate differences in the deep structures that underlie surface structures that might mistakenly be thought similar.

Appended to this article is an exercise calling for sentence-combining transforms, with some student results. While the exercise was designed as the culmination of a lesson on relative clauses, it provides opportunity for constructing other nominals as well. Some of the results show what happens when instructions are not followed or when the situation is not closely structured. Result A was written by a student from Thailand who, instead of using relative clauses, experimented with verbals. Part of his trouble comes from putting into coordinate positions ideas that are not coordinate, as in sentences 2 and 3. Result B, written by a teacher of English in a high school in Okinawa, is more successful, but he has some of the same trouble as student A in his sentence 2. In sentence 3 he has trouble with the order of the modifiers, particularly with the prepositional phrase at the end. Result C was written by a student born in Austria whose parents generally spoke Ukranian at home. In some cases she uses verbals rather than relative clauses as modifiers of nouns, but puts them in the relative clause position with satisfactory results.

The use of transformational grammar to teach composition is only one method. Slot substitution, questions and answers, or paraphrasing a model are also useful. My plea, however, is for composition instruction that is structured in some way, a method pointed toward the problems characteristic of foreign students, one that will emphasize prevention rather than correction of errors.

* * * * * * * * * * *

EXERCISE IN COMBINING SENTENCE PATTERNS

Included clauses help indicate the precise relationship between ideas. In order to make the following selection less wordy, express in one sentence the ideas between the bars. You will probably use included clauses to do this.

At the Airport

/ At the airport I always like to conjecture about the people. I see many people at the airport. / That lady is a grandmother. She is standing beside a jewelry counter. She is meeting a plane. Her daughter and two small grandchildren are on the plane. / That couple are newly married. I can tell this by their blissful faces. They are weighing in their luggage. They are buying their tickets. They are going on their honeymoon. / That man seems nervous. He is behind them. He constantly checks his watch. He keeps listening intently to the loudspeaker. The loudspeaker announces the flights. / Perhaps he has missed an important appointment. He is trying to get to his destination. He will leave on the next plane. That man is a business executive. He is wearing a dark suit. / Perhaps he is making a trip to Washington, D.C. He wants to talk to senators. The senators can initiate legislation. The legislation will help his business. /

STUDENT RESULTS

In the Airport

STUDENT A.

(1) Seeing many people at the airport, I always like to conjecture about the people. (2) Standing beside a jewelry counter, meeting a plane, her daughter and small grandchildren being on the plane is a grandmother. (3) That couple, weighing in their luggage, buying their tickets, going on their honeymoon are newly married because I can tell this by their blissful faces. (4) That man seems nervous being behind them, constantly checking his watch and listening intently to the loudspeaker who announces the flights. (5) A businessman who is wearing a dark suit has missed an important appointment, trying to get to his destination and will leave on the next plane. (6) Perhaps he is making a trip to Washington, D.C. wanting to talk to senators who can initiate legislation that will help his business.

At the Airport

STUDENT B.

(1) At the airport I always like to conjecture about the people whom I see there. (2) That lady who is standing beside a jewelry counter and who is meeting a plane is a grandmother whose daughter and two grandchildren are on the plane. (3) I can tell that that couple who are weighing their luggage, are buying their tickets and are going on their honeymoon are newly married by their blissful faces. (4) That man who is behind them seems nervous because he constantly checks his watch and keeps listening intently to the loudspeaker which announces the flights. (5) Perhaps that man, a business executive wearing a dark suit who is trying to get to his destination and will leave on the next plane has missed an important appointment. (6) Perhaps he is making a trip to Washington, D.C., and he wants to talk to senators who initiate legislation which will help his business.

At the Airport

STUDENT C.

(1) I always like to conjecture about the many people I see at the airport. (2) That lady, standing by a jewelry counter, is a grandmother meeting a plane on which are her daughter and two grandchildren. (3) That couple weighing in their luggage and buying their tickets, by their blissful faces are newly married and are going on their honeymoon.

(4) That man behind them, constantly checking his watch and listening intently to the loudspeaker that announces the flights, seems nervous. (5) That man, wearing a dark suit and trying to get to his destination is a business executive, who perhaps has missed an important appointment and will leave on the next plane.

(6) Perhaps he is making a trip to Washington, D.C. where he wants to talk to senators who can initiate legislation that will help his business.